

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF GAME AND INLAND FISHERIES

2015-2016 WATERFOWL SEASONS AND BAG LIMITS



Artwork for the 2015 Virginia Migratory Waterfowl Conservation Stamp by Guy Crittenden

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FACT SHEET - Waterfowl Hunters and Harvests - 2015

- Liberal duck seasons (60 days, 6-bird bag limit) and resident goose seasons have resulted in high waterfowl harvests in Virginia during the past ten years. Harvest has averaged ~141,000 ducks and ~53,900 geese from 2011 - 2014, compared to 114,770 ducks and 25,000 geese during the 1990's. The long season length and liberal bags offer greater opportunity and a greater cumulative harvest over the course of the season.
- The number of waterfowl hunters in Virginia have been generally stable since the late 1990's. Since 1999, the Harvest Information Program (HIP) has been used to estimate hunter effort and harvest. The average number of duck and goose hunters over the past 3 years, as measured by HIP, was 15,900 and 13,100 respectively.
- Cold winter conditions during the 2014-2015 season helped push migratory waterfowl from northern wintering areas into Virginia. These conditions concentrated waterfowl and encouraged local movements beneficial to hunters, likely improving hunter success. In late January low temperatures caused significant freezing throughout the state, pushing some birds to wintering areas farther south. In general, duck and goose harvests were similar to the previous year and very similar to the past 5-year average.
- The total estimated duck harvest in 2014-2015 in Virginia (141,300) was almost identical to the previous year (139,500) but was 4% below the past 5-year average (146,740).
- During the 2014-2015 season mallards were the most commonly harvested duck in Virginia, and along with the bufflehead, gadwall, wood duck and surf scoter comprise the top 5 harvested species. The mallard harvest in Virginia in 2014-15 (41,300) increased by 20% from 2014-2015, and was 19% higher than the past 3-year average (33,700).
- The total Canada goose harvest in Virginia in 2014-15 (45,300) decreased 22% from last year and was 16% below the past 3-year average (53,900).

FACT SHEET - The Status of Ducks - 2015

Mid-Continent Areas: Annual precipitation is the most important factor influencing the quantity and quality of nesting and brood rearing habitat for prairie-nesting birds. The number of ponds counted during the USFWS May breeding waterfowl survey is an index used for assessing waterfowl nesting conditions. Despite an early spring over most of the survey area, habitat conditions were similar to or poorer than last year. In many areas, the decline in habitat conditions was due to average or below average annual precipitation. The 2015 May-Pond count (6.3 million) was 12% below last year's count (7.2 million), but still 21% above the long-term average (5.2 million).

The total duck breeding population (BPOP) estimate for the mid-continent area this year is 49.5 million ducks, similar to last year's estimate of 49.2 million ducks and 43% higher than the long-term average (1955-2014). The Breeding population estimates (BPOP), along with the percent change from last year and the long-term average, are presented below for the 10 most common species.

Species	2015 BPOP	% Change from 2014	% Change from Long-Term Avg.
Mallard	11.6 million	+7%	+51%
Blue-winged Teal	8.5 million	0%	+73%
Green-winged Teal	4.0 million	+19%	+98%
Gadwall	3.8 million	+1%	+100%
Northern Shoveler	4.3 million	-17%	+75%
Northern Pintail	3.0 million	-6%	-24%
American Wigeon	3.0 million	-3%	+17%
Redhead	1.2 million	-6%	+71%
Scaup	4.4 million	-5%	-13%
Canvasback	757,000	+11%	+30%
Total Ducks	49.5 million	+1%	+43%

Eastern Breeding Areas: Winter and spring temperatures in the eastern survey area were again well below normal. Habitat conditions throughout the eastern breeding area ranged from excellent to fair. A protracted thaw in most areas likely impeded some nesting efforts.

- Breeding population estimates for the 6 most common species surveyed were slightly lower than last year and below their past ten-year averages. Black ducks (541,000) were 11% lower than last year and 13% lower than the long-term average. Other abundant species counted in the eastern survey area were Mallards (406,000), Ring-necked ducks (505,000), and Goldeneyes (358,000).

Virginia: Habitat conditions in Virginia during the spring of 2015 were fair. Delayed spring temperatures and relatively dry early conditions may have delayed some nesting efforts. Late spring precipitation re-charged many wetlands and likely encouraged any late or re-nesting efforts. Local duck and goose production is expected to be average or slightly below average. The breeding pair estimate for Mallards (18,618) increased and was 45% below the previous year's average. Wood duck breeding pair estimates (24,081) increased and were 10% above the previous year's average. Canada goose breeding pair estimates (40,199) increased and were 36% below the previous year's average.

GENERAL DUCK SEASON

Season Length:

60 hunting days; plus 2 Youth Waterfowl Hunting Day

Season Dates:

October 9 - 12 (Black Duck closed) (4 days)

November 18 – November 29 (12 days)

December 19 – January 31 (44 days)

(60 days)

October 24, February 6 - Youth Waterfowl Days

Bag Limit:

Daily Bag limit: 6 ducks of any species except for the following restrictions: can include no more than 4 mallards (only 2 can be hen mallards), 4 scoters, 2 scaup, 3 wood ducks, 2 redheads, 2 pintail, 1 black duck (except closed Oct. 9 – 12), **2 canvasback**, 1 mottled duck, and 1 fulvous whistling duck.

Closed season on harlequin duck.

The possession limit is three times the daily bag limit.

Shooting Hours:

1/2-hour before sunrise until sunset daily

***Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days**

Guidelines for the proposed Youth Days include:

1. States may select 2 days per duck-hunting zone, designated as "Youth Waterfowl Hunting Days," in addition to their regular duck seasons.
2. The 2 days (no longer required to be consecutive) must be held outside of any regular duck season on a weekend, holidays, or other non-school days when youth hunters would have the maximum opportunity to participate.
3. The days could be held up to 14 days before or after any regular duck season frameworks or within any split of a regular duck season.
4. The daily bag limit is the same as that allowed in the regular season and includes ducks, mergansers, coots, moorhens, gallinules, 2 Canada geese (except in Canada Goose Zones where the bag limit is higher), and 1 tundra swan (if the youth possesses a tundra swan permit). Flyway species restrictions remain in effect.
5. Youth hunters must be 15 years of age or younger. Youth 12 years of age and older will need a valid Virginia state hunting license.
6. A licensed adult at least 18 years of age or older must accompany the youth hunter into the field. This adult may not duck hunt, but may participate in other open seasons

MERGANSER AND COOT SEASONS

MERGANSER

Season Dates:

To coincide with general duck season

Bag Limit:

5 birds daily, of which only 2 birds may be a hooded merganser (15 in possession, only 6 of which may be hooded mergansers)

AMERICAN COOT

Season Dates:

To coincide with general duck season.

Bag Limit:

15 daily (45 in possession)

SPECIAL SEA DUCK SEASON IN SEA DUCK ZONE *

SEA DUCKS (SCOTER, LONG-TAILED DUCK, AND EIDER)

Season Dates:

October 17 - January 31 (107 days)

Bag Limit:

7 birds per day (21 in possession), may include no more than 4 scoters (12 in possession)

* **Sea Duck Zone:** Those waters at a distance greater than 800 yards from any shore, island or emergent vegetation in the following area: the ocean waters of Virginia, the tidal waters of Northampton and Accomack Counties, and the Chesapeake Bay and each of its tributaries up to the first highway bridge. Back Bay and its tributaries are not included in the Sea Duck Zone.

- **FACT SHEET- The Status of Migrant Canada Geese - 2015** ---

- Migrant Canada geese from the Atlantic Population declined significantly from the mid-1980's through the mid-1990s. The hunting season was closed in 1995 to allow the population to recover. The population rebounded quickly between 1995 and 1999, and a limited hunting season (6 days with a 1 bird bag) was held in both 1999 and 2000.
- As the population increased, hunting regulations were liberalized. The season was extended to 30 days in 2001, and 45 days in 2002. In 2004, the season remained at 45 days and a 2-geese daily bag was allowed for the last 20 days. From 2005 through 2011, the season was 45 days with 2 geese for the entire season. In 2012 the season was extended to 50 days and the bag limit remained at 2 per day.
- The breeding population estimate for 2015 (161,302) was 16% below the 2014 estimate.

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>NUMBER OF PAIRS</u>	
1988	118,031	
1993	91,307	
1994	40,086	
1995	29,302	(season closed)
1996	46,058	“ “
1997	63,216	“ “
1998	42,166	(season closed, incomplete survey)
1999	77,451	(season reopened, 6 days/1 bird)
2000	93,230	
2001	146,662	
2002	164,840	
2003	156,937	
2004	174,793	
2005	162,395	
2006	160,020	
2007	195,709	
2008	169,699	
2009	176,118	
2010	154,028	
2011	194,900	
2012	190,300	
2013	N/A	(survey not completed)
2014	191,234	
2015	161,302	

- Habitat conditions on the nesting grounds were less favorable than in 2014, particularly along the Hudson Bay coast where ice and snow persisted longer into the spring than in recent years.
- Production for 2015 is forecast to be below average.

FACT SHEET - The Status of Resident Canada Geese - 2015

- The resident Canada goose population increased significantly during the 1980's and 1990's. The population peaked at over 260,000 geese in the mid-late 1990's in Virginia and has been steadily reduced by specific management programs since that time. The current population estimate is 150,650 (+/- 30,000) in Virginia and over 1 million in the Atlantic Flyway.
- Special resident goose hunting seasons were initiated in 1993 to help manage this population and to provide opportunities for hunters. These seasons occur prior to the arrival of migrant geese, or in areas where there are fewer migrant geese. Migrant geese begin to arrive in Virginia around September 25, so the Federal Framework allows Virginia to conduct a Resident goose season from September 1-25.
- There are fewer migrant geese West of I-95, and a special late hunting season was initiated there in 1996-97. In 2009, we split this "Western Hunt Zone" into two separate zones to provide even more opportunities to harvest resident geese.
- Special resident goose seasons have been very popular. These seasons are also the most effective tool in managing resident goose populations in areas where hunting is allowed. Liberal hunting seasons have increased hunter participation and resident goose harvests, and have been effective in managing the population. Harvest objectives are to maintain the statewide population at the current level.
- In areas where hunting is not feasible, other options are necessary to mitigate conflicts. New strategies including Airport, Agricultural, and Nest and Egg Depredation Orders have been implemented in the last several years to help manage resident goose conflicts.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Resident Goose Pop. Est. 3-Year running Avg. (+/-25%)</u>	<u>September Harvest</u>	<u>Late Season Harvest</u>
1993	115,835	2,316	--
1994	129,409	3,464	--
1995	151,043	5,500	--
1996	181,813	10,000	12,000
1997	249,612	10,500	15,400
1998	264,867	12,200	19,000
1999	261,554	12,800	21,900
2000	227,164	13,400	44,100
2001	218,384	11,800	31,800
2002	218,719	14,300	26,800
2003	192,780	14,800	17,000
2004	152,015	17,000	14,100
2005	141,377	10,100	9,200
2006	145,322	11,100	15,700
2007	157,598	13,600	11,800
2008	154,984	17,500	16,800
2009	142,311	16,800	16,600
2010	147,313	15,600	--
2011	154,637	14,700	--
2012	158,267	9,700	--
2013	144,907	10,700	--
2014	130,503	7,500	--
2015	150,650	--	--

Canada Goose Populations and Hunt Zones

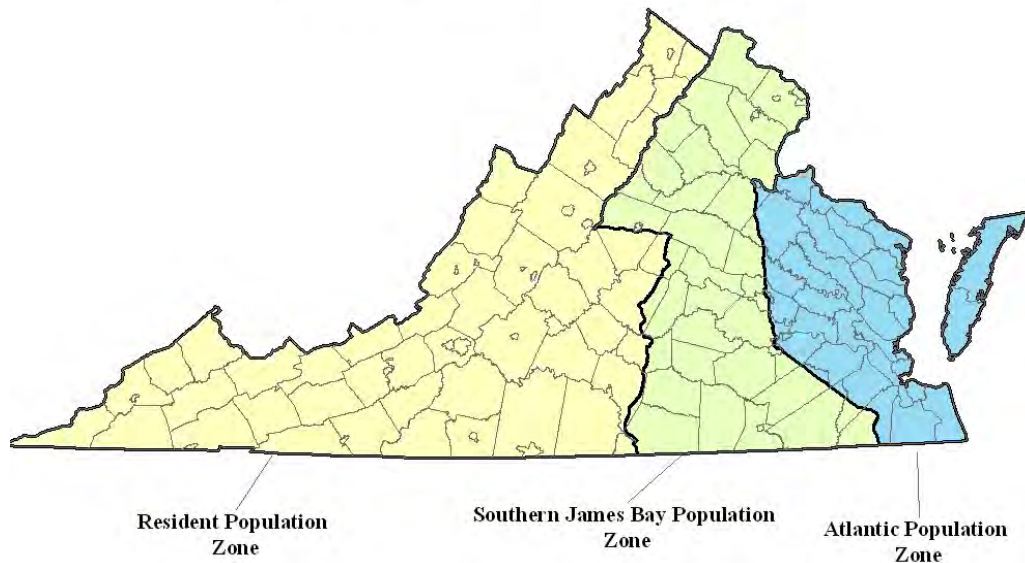
- There are 4 subpopulations of Canada geese in Virginia. These include the Atlantic Flyway Resident Population (RP) along with three migrant goose populations, the North Atlantic Population (NAP), the Southern James Bay Population (SJB), and the Atlantic Population (AP). The majority of our migrant geese (~82%) are from the AP, about 18% are from the SJB, and <1% are from the NAP.
- Recent research and banding analyses have enabled us to better delineate the distribution and migration corridors used by these different subpopulations, and to establish separate hunting zones based on the percentage of migrant geese in each zone. These zones include the:

Atlantic Population (AP) Hunt Zone – The area east of the Stafford/King George County line from the Potomac River south to the Rappahannock River, then west along the Stafford County line to Interstate 95, then south along I-95 to Route 460 in Petersburg, then southeast along Route 460 to Route 32 in the City of Suffolk, then south to the North Carolina border.

Southern James Bay Population (SJB) Hunt Zone – The area to the west of the AP Hunt Zone boundary and east of the following line: the “Blue Ridge” (Loudoun County-Clarke County line) at the West Virginia-Virginia Border, south to Interstate 64 (the Blue Ridge line follows county borders along the western edge of Loudoun-Fauquier-Rappahannock-Madison-Greene-Albemarle and into Nelson Counties), then east along Interstate Rt. 64 to Route 15, then south along Rt. 15 to the North Carolina line.

Resident Population (RP) Hunt Zone – The portion of the state west of the SJB Hunt Zone.

Virginia's Canada Goose Hunt Zones



CANADA GOOSE SEASON

ATLANTIC POPULATION ZONE: (AP)

<u>Season Dates:</u>	November 24 – November 29 December 19 – January 31
<u>Bag Limit:</u>	2 geese per day (6 in possession)
<u>Shooting Hours:</u>	1/2-hour before sunrise until sunset daily

SOUTHERN JAMES BAY POPULATION ZONE (SJBZ)

<u>Season Dates:</u>	Regular Season: November 18 – November 29 3/day December 19 – January 14 3/day
	Extended Season: January 15 - February 15 5/day
<u>Shooting Hours:</u>	1/2-hour before sunrise until sunset daily

RESIDENT POPULATION ZONE: (RP)

<u>Season Dates:</u>	November 18 – November 29 December 19 - February 24
<u>Bag Limit:</u>	5 birds daily (15 in possession)
<u>Shooting Hours:</u>	1/2-hour before sunrise until sunset daily

NOTE – All seasons also include White-fronted geese along with Canada geese.

FACT SHEET - Status of Light Geese (Greater and Lesser Snow Geese, and Ross's Geese) - 2015

- The Greater Snow Goose population is monitored on spring staging areas near the St. Lawrence Valley in Quebec. The 2015 population estimate was 818,000 geese (+/-7%), which is 3% higher than last year and similar to the long term average.
- The principal nesting areas for greater snow geese are on Bylot, Axel Heiberg, Ellesmere, and Baffin Islands, and on Greenland. These geese winter along the Atlantic Coast from New Jersey to North Carolina.
- Conditions and nesting phenology were average in the main snow goose nesting areas this year. Annual production and the fall flight is expected to be higher than last year, and still in the average to good range.
- Over the last 30 years, snow goose populations have increased almost ten-fold. A shift from feeding almost exclusively in marshes to feeding more on agricultural grains has allowed them to expand their range and habitat use. This shift has also allowed them to return to their breeding habitats in better physical condition, which has led to increased productivity.
- This population boom has resulted in ecological degradation on their breeding, migration and wintering areas. It has also led to conflicts with agricultural interest. Snow geese can cause damage to these habitats by pulling up plant roots and denuding marshes of vegetation.
- Current hunting regulations for snow geese are as liberal as Federal Frameworks will allow and include a 107-day season that runs from October to January, and a bag limit that was increased from 15 to 25 in 2010. Liberal seasons have helped increase the harvest, however, the population is still quite large and concerns remain about detrimental impacts these birds are having on breeding and wintering habitats.
- A Conservation Order (CO) hunting season was established in 2009, and authorizes the use of alternative management strategies (unplugged shotguns, electronic calls, shooting to ½ hour after sunset, no daily bag limit) to further increase the harvest of snow geese in the Atlantic Flyway. The number of hunters participating in this season in Virginia has averaged 213 per year and the harvest has averaged 557 snow geese per year, however, harvest and participation rates have gone down each year.

LIGHT GOOSE SEASONS

LIGHT GOOSE SEASON

Season Dates:

October 17 – January 31 (107 days)

Bag Limit:

25 birds daily (no possession limit)

LIGHT GOOSE CONSERVATION ORDER SEASON

Conservation Order Season Zone: The same as the AP Canada Goose Zone - The area east of the Stafford/King George County line from the Potomac River south to the Rappahannock River, then west along the Stafford County line to Interstate 95, then south along I-95 to Route 460 in Petersburg, then southeast along Route 460 to Route 32 in the City of Suffolk, then south to the North Carolina border.

Season Dates:

February 1 – April 5 (65 days)

Bag Limit:

No daily or possession limit

Special Hunting Methods:

Electronic calls, unplugged shotguns and extended shooting hours to one-half hour after sunset.

Special Requirements:

Hunters participating in the Conservation Order Season must register, keep a record of their harvest and participation, and return a harvest report form within two weeks following the close of the season.

FACT SHEET - Status of Atlantic Brant and Tundra Swan - 2015

- **Brant.** The main breeding areas for Atlantic Brant are in the Eastern Canadian Arctic on Baffin, Southampton, and Ellesmere Islands. Most brant winter along the Atlantic Coast from Massachusetts to North Carolina.
- Breeding habitat conditions were average to below average this year and brant production is expected to fair to poor again this year. This makes the 4th year in a row that brant production has been poor.
- The 2015 Mid-Winter Survey (MWS) count of brant in the Atlantic Flyway (111,434) was 17% lower than the 2014 estimates. The MWS three-year running average is 130,833.
- The Brant Hunt Plan was modified to reduce the hunting season to 30 days with a 1 brant/day limit this year (from 30 days, 2 brant/day last year). This reduction is expected to achieve a 33% reduction in the harvest.
- **Tundra Swans.** The Eastern Population of tundra swans nest in arctic tundra areas from the Seward Peninsula of Alaska, east to Hudson Bay and Baffin Island. These birds winter in coastal areas from Maryland to North Carolina. Production of eastern population tundra swans in 2015 is expected to be similar to last year.
- There were 117,100 eastern population tundra swans counted on the 2015 Mid-Winter Survey, which is 7% higher than the 2015 count. The three-year running average is 109,714 and no changes in harvest regulations are called for this year.
- Eight 8 states in the U.S. hunt tundra swans including Alaska, Utah, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, South Dakota, North Carolina and Virginia. Hunting permits (9,600 total) are allocated across these states based on swan numbers and distribution.
- In the Atlantic Flyway, NC winters around 70,000 tundra swans (~70% of the AF population), MD ~ 16,000, and VA ~ 6,000, with PA (~1,000), DE (300), and NJ (300) making up the bulk of the remainder. The Atlantic Flyway allocation of 5,600 permits is split between the 2 hunting states in proportion to swan numbers: NC receives 5,000 and VA receives 600.
- The tundra swan hunting season in Virginia is authorized and conducted as specified in the Atlantic Flyway Tundra Swan Management Plan and Hunt Plan, with limits and guidelines as specified under an MOU with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

ATLANTIC BRANT

ATLANTIC BRANT:

Season Dates: January 2 - January 31 (30 days)
Bag Limit: 1 bird daily (3 in possession)

TUNDRA SWAN

TUNDRA SWAN:

Season Dates: November 18 - January 31
Bag Limit: One per permittee per season
Hunt Area: All counties and portions of counties east of U.S. Route I- 95 and south of the Prince William/Stafford county line in Chopawamsic Creek at Quantico Marine Corps Base.

NOTE: VDGIF will issue no more than 600 swan hunting permits to holders of a valid Virginia hunting license. Only hunters with a valid 2015-2016 tundra swan hunting permit issued by VDGIF shall be authorized to hunt tundra swans. Each permittee will be authorized to take one tundra swan during the season. Swan hunting permits are non-transferable and are valid for use only by the person to whom issued. Permits must be in the immediate possession of the permittee while swan hunting. Immediately at the time and place of kill, successful hunters must cancel their swan-hunting permit by permanently recording the month and day of kill and by attaching it to the swan as instructed on the permit. The VDGIF is required to obtain hunter participation and harvest information to offer this Tundra Swan hunting season. Hunters are required to complete the accompanying tundra swan hunt questionnaire and return it to the address listed on the questionnaire at the end of the hunt. Those who fail to return a completed questionnaire by February 15, 2016 are ineligible for future drawings.

FALCONRY

Season Length: 107 hawking days
No combination of falconry and firearms hunting can exceed 107 days for any species.

Bag Limit: 3 daily (9 in possession)

DUCKS, MERGANSERS, COOTS:

Season Dates: October 9- 12
November 18 – February 12

CANADA GOOSE:

Season Dates: November 18 – November 29
December 19 - February 24

BRANT and SNOW GOOSE:

Season Dates: October 17 – January 31